



ST JAMES AYR – SUNDAY REFLECTIONS – 23 June 2024

Introduction



Welcome to the latest Sunday Reflection, an opportunity to be still and reflect on our faith.

Please consider sharing this document if it is safe for you to do so.

INTIMATIONS

7 July: Coffee after Church

17 July: Newton Park Court

Call to worship

The apostle says:

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. (Hebrews 1,11)

Hymn:

All Ages Talk

Hymn:

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Let us pray

Gracious Father,

We come to you with songs of worship on our lips, we come to you with praise and adoration, because you are higher than all our understanding and we put our trust and our faith in you. We know that when we walk with you we will not walk alone.

Loving God,

You have walked with your people in fire and cloud and led them safely into the promised land from the slavery of Egypt. You walk with us still through tough times and danger and through good times and joy. You will never let our foot stumble. We thank you, our God.

You have sent your son Jesus Christ to heal and to save through faith in him and in you. You have sent him to walk with us through joy and sorrow and to share our humanity, to suffer human pain so we are redeemed from our sin through the shame and agony of the cross and through the glory of his resurrection. We thank you, our redeemer.

You have given us the Holy Spirit, so we are not alone after your son ascended into heaven, so we feel your presence through the ages, the presence of a God, who has promised never to forsake us, and we find strength in our faith in you through the Spirit. We thank you, everlasting father.

Forgiving Lord,

You have made us promise to be your God through your servant Moses at mount Sinai, you renewed this promise through your son

Jesus Christ and yet we can find it difficult to put our faith and our trust in you. For this we are truly sorry.

You have sent your son out of love to us and we need his love in our lives. Yet we are not always willing or able to love each other as he loved us, to care for each other as he did when he came to comfort and to heal. For this we ask your forgiveness.

Gracious Lord

We know that we have failed you and each other, but we also know that you have sent your son Jesus Christ to us, to redeem us from our sin, and in this assurance we pray to you as Jesus has taught us to pray.

Our father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be Thy name, thy kingdom come

Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread

and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors

and lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil

for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN

Hymn:

READINGS

2 Samuel 1, 17-27

¹⁷ David sang this lament for Saul and his son Jonathan, ¹⁸ and ordered it^[a] to be taught to the people of Judah. (It is recorded in *The book of Jashar*.) ¹⁹ “On the hills of Israel our leaders are dead! The bravest of our soldiers have fallen!²⁰ Do not announce it in Gath or in the streets of Ashkelon. Do not make the women of Philistia glad; do not let the daughters of pagans rejoice. ²¹ “May no rain or dew fall on Gilboa's hills; may its fields be always barren! For the shields of the brave lie there in disgrace; the shield of Saul is no longer polished with oil.²² Jonathan's bow was deadly, the sword of Saul was merciless, striking down the mighty, killing the enemy.²³ “Saul and Jonathan, so wonderful and dear; together in life, together in death; swifter than eagles, stronger than lions.²⁴ “Women of Israel, mourn for Saul! He clothed you in rich scarlet dresses and adorned you with jewels and gold.²⁵ “The brave soldiers have fallen they were killed in battle. Jonathan lies dead in the hills.²⁶ “I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan; how dear you were to me! How wonderful was your love for me, better even than the love of women. ²⁷ “The brave soldiers have fallen, their weapons abandoned and useless.”

Mark 5, 21- 43

²¹ Jesus went back across to the other side of the lake. There at the lakeside a large crowd gathered around him. ²² Jairus, an official of the local synagogue, arrived, and when he saw Jesus, he threw himself down at his feet ²³ and begged him earnestly, “My little daughter is very sick. Please come and place your hands on her, so that she will get well and live!”²⁴ Then Jesus started off with him. So many people were going along with Jesus that they were crowding him from every side. ²⁵ There was a woman who had suffered terribly from severe bleeding for twelve years, ²⁶ even though she had been treated by many doctors. She had spent all her money, but instead of getting better she got worse all the time. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, so she came in the crowd behind him, ²⁸ saying to herself, “If I just touch his clothes, I will get well.” ²⁹ She touched his cloak, and her bleeding stopped at once; and she had the feeling inside herself that she was healed of her trouble. ³⁰ At once Jesus knew that power had gone out of him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” ³¹ His disciples answered, “You see how the people are crowding you; why do you ask who touched you?” ³² But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³ The woman realized what had happened to her, so she came, trembling with fear, knelt at his feet, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ Jesus said to her, “My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your trouble.”³⁵ While Jesus was saying this, some messengers came from Jairus' house and told him, “Your daughter has died. Why bother the Teacher any longer?” ³⁶ Jesus paid no attention to^[a] what they said, but told him, “Don't be afraid, only believe.” ³⁷ Then he did not let anyone else go on with him except Peter and James and his brother John. ³⁸ They arrived at Jairus' house, where Jesus saw the confusion and heard all the loud crying and wailing. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, “Why all this confusion? Why are you crying? The child is not dead—she is only sleeping!”⁴⁰ They started making fun of him, so he put them all out, took the child's father and mother and his three disciples, and went into the room where the child was lying. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, “*Talitha, koum,*” which means, “Little girl, I tell you to get up!” ⁴² She got up at once and started walking around. (She was twelve years old.) When this happened, they were completely amazed. ⁴³ But Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone, and he said, “Give her something to eat.”

REFLECTION

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit

Loving God,

You have sent your son to this world to heal us and redeem us, to show your love to us, for this we thank you with all our hearts. In this hour we ask that you may send your Holy Spirit into our hearts, so we know your infinite love and can spread your love to those around us.

For this we ask in Jesus' name. AMEN

Friends,

Nowadays I rarely think back to my cancer diagnosis nearly eight years ago. It is a chapter well and truly in my past and that is as it should be. Only on certain dates, the day I ended my chemotherapy or the day of my surgery, for example, I give this past a fleeting thought. And when I do, I do so with gratitude. Even if the cancer came back tomorrow, even if it would prove incurable this time, I have had eight good years that I would probably not have had fifty years ago. One sentence though I can remember as if it was yesterday: When I came out of surgery, the consultant said to me: "you do not have cancer anymore. Everything we do now is to prevent it coming back". This sentence was incredibly liberating. I am not saying that all my anxieties and apprehensions were gone, I still had the dreaded chemo in front of me, but to be cancer free, to be effectively healed from this treacherous disease, was as if a black stain was washed away and I can say without exaggeration that this was one of the most life changing experiences I have ever had.

Both of our scripture readings are dealing with raw life experiences, with bereavement and loss, with debilitating illness, but also with life changing encounters, with healing even.

In our Old Testament reading the life changing meeting had already happened. David encounters Saul and he becomes first the leader of the Israelite army, their first general and then their king. And then he meets Jonathan, his best friend, his brother-in-arms, who had saved David's skin more than once, without whom he would not have become who and what he is. And in our reading today all comes crushing down. Saul and Jonathan are both dead and a new era begins. The era that will lead David to the height of his power and Israel into a golden age, an age that generations after him will yearn for and sing songs about.

But this comes at a cost. David may have already been anointed the King of Israel, chosen by Samuel and by God himself, but until the people swear loyalty to him and accept him as their king he still has a long way to go. And the first thing before any of this can happen is that David must deal with grief and loss. And in our scripture reading today he does so. He writes a lament, a song of sorrow – or rather, it is ascribed to him and teaches it to all his people. It may seem a bit strange, since the relationship between David and Saul at least had always been, shall we say - a little tense to the point that Saul was ready to kill David and David had to flee and hide. And now listen to David: Saul is “the bravest of soldiers”, “swift as an eagle, strong as a lion”, “wonderful and dear”. And while all that tallies with David's relationship with Jonathan, with whom he had always been close, when it comes to Saul it does not seem quite right. Cynics might say it is all politics, a way to cement David as Saul's successor – and maybe there is an element of this. But it may just as well be that there is a real change, that Saul's death makes all the difference and David – as he is described in the book of Samuel - finally sees the good side of his predecessor and really grieves. It may just be that for David, Saul's death has prompted a change of heart, as well as a change of circumstance.

Change is always painful and the Bible acknowledges it and today's passage is one of the texts that focusses on human nature, on the reality of loss and grief. The Old Testament alone spans more than 1000 years and it would be strange and maybe unhealthy if all had stayed the same, it would be equally strange, however, if those changes in the history of Israel would all have gone smoothly without hurt and sadness. That is a timeless truth and it is as much a challenge for us as it was for David around 3000 years ago. The changes that will happen and the changes that are happening in our society and in our church are truly seismic and it is as important to acknowledge the pain that comes with it as it is to acknowledge it's necessity. It is important that people have the chance to grieve for the past before they can move on, before they, too, like David have a change of heart.

But where is God in all this? In our Old Testament reading he is strangely absent. Our New Testament Reading, however, may shed some light on this. It consists of two stories, intertwined with each other, distinctly different but strikingly similar at the same time. One is about a little girl whom Jesus raises from the dead, the other is about a woman who had been ill for decades. Both the woman and the girl's father turn to Jesus for help. And so the life changing encounters in this passage are not a thing of the past, they happen here and now, when the official of the local synagogue and the sick woman both meet Jesus. And here is the first and most striking element both stories have in common: the unconditional, unwavering trust in Jesus, in his ability to make them or their loved ones well, in his willingness to do so, in his authority to deliver, an authority directly given by God. When the synagogue official pleads for his daughter, he says: "Please come and place your hands on her, so that she will get well and live!" and the woman who had been suffering for so long thinks: "If I just touch his clothes, I will get well." For both of them it is clear that Jesus can and will help and he does. And what is more: he does so in the name of the almighty God. And here is the second thing the two interlinked stories have in common: Both times Jesus turns to the vulnerable, the underprivileged to help.

To be sure, the little girl's father is described as an official from the local synagogue, a sign that Jesus' God-given authority is acknowledged even by political and religious leaders of the time, but those who actually require healing: the girl that is at death's door and the woman who suffers from severe bleeding are among the least privileged of Jesus' society. They are both female for a start, at Jesus' time this alone will have marked them out for limited opportunities. The suffering woman is also poor, she had spent all her money on cures that did not work and the official's daughter is a child, dying and dead before she can take her rightful place in society. In turning to them Jesus echoes and fulfils God's commandment to protect the helpless and to care for the vulnerable, to not oppress the widows and the orphans – or anyone else who through birth or destiny is denied the opportunity to look after themselves.

In one aspect, though the two stories differ, the longer story about the little girl goes beyond the story of the bleeding woman: here it is not just an illness, that Jesus heals, he actually raises a child from the dead, a foreshadowing of what is central to our faith: Jesus' own death and resurrection.

And this is how we can interpret all of Jesus healings: They show that Jesus has the authority from God, to heal, to make people and the world better, to bring God's kingdom into the world, a kingdom where all live well. Jesus' healings foreshadow what might be: What happens to the bleeding woman and to the dead girl will happen to us all, man, woman or child, rich or poor, vulnerable or privileged. And in it is in the cross and resurrection that healing takes place as the prophet Isaiah says: He has carried our iniquities and by his wounds we are healed. AMEN

Hymn:

INTERCESSION

Loving God,

We can trust in you to protect us, to not let our foot stumble, to walk with us by day and by night, through joy and sorrow. We will never face the challenges of life alone, because you and your son are with us each day. For this we offer our deepest thanks and in gratitude for your assurances and promises, we lift up to you all those who feel alone in their troubles, who cannot find you in their lives.

We will continue to pray for all people who live under the shadow of war and conflict, violence and instability, for all who grieve for brothers and sisters, parents and children lost, for all who are wounded, for all who stand before the rubble that once was their home. May they all find strength in you.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

We pray for all who work for a just society and a just world where all are equal and all are valued in Afghanistan, in Iran and all over the world. We pray for those whose peaceful protests are brutally punished and for those whose voices go unheard. May they draw courage from your presence.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

We pray for all who care for justice in this country and in this town. We pray for charities and volunteers who give their time and talent for those in need, for groups and individuals who help those around them with food or clothing or company. May they know that they are needed and valued.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

We will always continue to pray for everyone in our congregation and in our community, for those who are in hospital waiting impatiently to be discharged, for all who go through bereavement

and loss and for those who have lost their independence and must adjust to a life in care homes. May they all know your presence

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

For all this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

We prepare for the dedication of the offering

Dedication

Loving God,

You have given us your promise to walk with us throughout our lives, to be with us in joy and in sorrow. You have given us your Spirit so we can live in faith and in trust to you. For all this we are truly grateful and in gratitude for all these wonderful things you have done for us we bring to your table some of our worldly possessions and we dedicate them to you together with our lives and our service. We ask that you may bless us and our gifts, so we build your kingdom together.

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Hymn:

Benediction

And the God who heals and cares guard you and guide you in this coming week. And the almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore. AMEN

